

# Childhood Asthma

## Fact Sheet



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

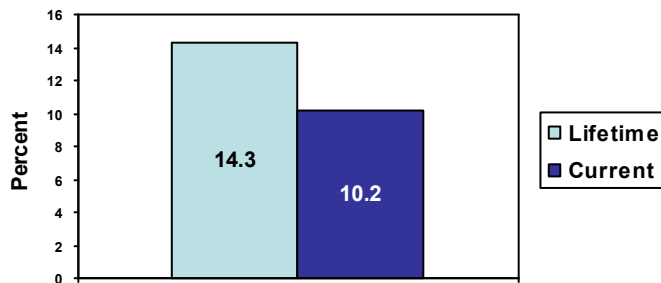
**An estimated 10.2% of Mississippi children currently have asthma.**

### WHAT IS ASTHMA?

- Asthma is a common childhood disease that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten and swell
- Symptoms include shortness of breath, wheezing, cough, and chest tightness
- Symptoms can range from mild to life threatening
- Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled

### WHO HAS ASTHMA?

Lifetime and Current Asthma Prevalence Among Mississippi Children, 2006<sup>1</sup>



- **Lifetime Asthma:** In 2006, about 14.3% of Mississippi children under age 18 had ever been told by a health professional that they have asthma
- **Current Asthma:** In 2006, about 10.2% of Mississippi children under age 18 currently had asthma
- **Asthma Disparities:** About 11% of black children in Mississippi currently have asthma, compared to 7% of white children<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT CAUSES ASTHMA?

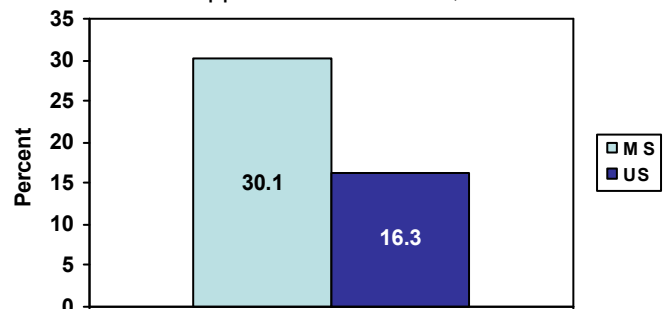
Asthma attacks happen when triggers at home, at school, and in the environment make the airways to the lungs irritated and inflamed. Common triggers include:

- Pollen and Mold
- Pet dander
- Cockroaches
- Cigarette, wood, and other smoke
- Cold, flu, or respiratory infections
- Climate changes (weather, temperature, etc.)
- Food allergies (nuts, dairy products, etc.)
- Exercise
- Dust & dust mites

### ASTHMA & FAMILIES:

Childhood asthma has a serious effect on Mississippi families. About 30.1% of Mississippi families say their child's asthma has a great or medium impact on the entire family, compared to 16.3% nationwide.

Impact of Asthma on Families Mississippi vs. United States, 2003<sup>2</sup>



### MANAGING ASTHMA:

"What's so frustrating about asthma is that it is a manageable disease that all too often is not being managed, resulting in trips to the ER and limiting normal childhood activity."

Dr. Anne Yates, Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Allergy/Immunology, University of MS Medical Center

### Childhood asthma is treatable. Ways to control asthma include:

- Identify, avoid and remove asthma triggers at home and at school
- Use an individualized asthma action plan to control childhood asthma. Doctors, families, and children should work together to create a plan based on individual triggers, medications, and warning signs
- Vaccinate children against the flu
- Educate teachers, administrators, and policy makers about asthma

<sup>1</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2004 & 2006

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Children's Health, 2003

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**Asthma is one of the leading causes of missed school days nationwide.**

### Asthma at School:

- Children may be exposed to asthma triggers at school. Triggers commonly found in school buildings include mold, cockroaches, and dust
- School days missed due to asthma can decrease academic achievement
- Children spend a significant part of their day in school. School staff play an important role in asthma management

### A School Nurse's Experience:

Michelle Ellison, the School Health Nurse at Madison Station Elementary School in Madison, Mississippi, shares her experience with asthma:

**"I have asthma, so I know what it feels like when you can't catch your next breath.**

I am a school nurse in Mississippi. I help children with many different health problems, and the most difficult health issue is asthma. I will never forget my first day as a school nurse, about 10 years ago. My door opened and a little girl screamed, "Nurse Ellison, Nurse Ellison, help us please!" as a five-year-old boy entered the room unable to talk, tears streaming down his face. I knew the look on his face—I've been there—his face said, *soon I will not be able to catch my next breath.* Helpless and scared, my little five-year-old friend grabbed my hand and placed it on his chest. He used his body language to tell me he was having an asthma attack.

Fortunately, I was aware of this child's asthma and had the medication he needed in my office. I was prepared because his parents and I met to plan exactly how to intervene should he have an attack. I delivered the medication and the boy returned to class less than an hour after his asthma attack began.

For the first time, I found myself thankful that I have asthma and can relate, understand, and have the knowledge necessary to care for my students as only a school nurse can.

What would have happened to this student if his parents and school nurse did not have an asthma action plan in place? Asthma is a serious disease that will not be outgrown. We must educate children, parents, and caregivers to help students who suffer with asthma. Their lives are in our hands. If you can't breathe, nothing else matters."

### Asthma Coalition of Mississippi:



To begin helping Mississippi children with asthma and their families, the Asthma Coalition of Mississippi (ACM) included recommendations related to childhood asthma in the Mississippi State Asthma Plan:

1. **Schools should increase asthma education for children with asthma, parents, and school staff**
2. **Schools should adopt policies and procedures that ensure appropriate asthma management for students with asthma**
3. **Physicians should utilize an asthma action plan with their patients**



**The Southwest ACM**

If you are interested in joining the ACM's work to promote education, prevention, and management of asthma in Mississippi, please contact Leslie Guyot, American Lung Association of Mississippi, at 601-206-5810 or [lguyot@alams.org](mailto:lguyot@alams.org) for more information.

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